

Kiyoshi Koyama, Prominent Japanese Jazz Journalist, Dies at 82

Kiyoshi Koyama, the longtime editor of the jazz magazine *Swing Journal*, at his home in Chiba Prefecture, near Tokyo, last year. By the end of his life, his personal archive included close to 30,000 vinyl albums and CDs. Katherine Whatley

By **Giovanni Russonello**

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Kiyoshi Koyama, widely regarded as Japan's pre-eminent jazz journalist, who covered the music's development throughout the 1960s and '70s before becoming a producer of archival albums, died on Feb. 3 in Kashiwa, Japan. He was 82.

Katherine Whatley, a journalist and friend of Mr. Koyama, said the cause was stomach cancer.

As the editor of *Swing Journal*, the leading jazz magazine in one of the world's most jazz-loving countries, Mr. Koyama rigorously covered the music being made on both sides of the Pacific Ocean, often traveling to the United States.

He went to New York in the summer of 1969 to report on the city's avant-garde scene, which was abuzz with insurgent energy, and paid a consequential visit to the saxophonist Ornette Coleman, a creator of free jazz, who had recently moved into a loft space at 131 Prince Street in SoHo. Mr. Koyama watched Coleman's band rehearsing and spent time with him in his living quarters above the rehearsal space.

"My style is to meet a musician and see his home, and find out how they live. That shows me another side of the musician. That's interesting to me," Mr. Koyama told Ms. Whatley for [a 2015 article](#) in the English-language publication *The Japan Times*. "That's why I visited Ornette's place, too. You can find a different side of a musician from the one on stage."

Throughout his career Mr. Koyama conducted interviews with many of the leading figures in American jazz, including Miles Davis and [Albert Ayler](#), as well as esteemed Japanese musicians like Sadao Watanabe and Toshiko Akiyoshi.

The Prince Street loft, which Coleman would soon rename Artist House and convert into a venue for public performances, became a harbinger of things to come in Lower Manhattan, where a community of artist-run lofts [soon sprang up](#).

Mr. Koyama's 1969 [dispatch](#) was one of the earliest international reports on the so-called loft jazz scene and predated most such reporting even from domestic sources. He returned to New York almost every summer throughout the 1970s to continue covering creative developments there.

After becoming editor of Swing Journal in 1967, Mr. Koyama quickly converted the publication from a tabloid that relied heavily on articles from wire services and pieces adapted from English-language publications into a source of first-class music criticism and reportage.

He remained editor until 1981, when he shifted his focus to producing historical albums, often by mining his own extensive record collection.

By the end of his life, Mr. Koyama's personal archive included close to 30,000 vinyl albums and CDs. He also retained a copy of nearly every issue of Swing Journal, hundreds of books, and cassette tapes of his interviews. He recently donated the archive to New York University.

Mr. Koyama was Swing Journal's editor again from 1990 to 1993. The magazine [ceased publication in 2010](#), amid falling advertising revenues.

Kiyoshi Koyama was born in Sakai, in the Osaka Prefecture, on Feb. 12, 1936. His father had owned a sewing machine factory, but it burned down during World War II.

He is survived by his wife, Takako Koyama, and a brother.

Mr. Koyama's earliest exposure to jazz came in the 1940s through the Far East Network, a group of radio stations run by the United States military, and the Japanese station NHK. "I would rush home on the train after school to listen to NHK," he told Ms. Whatley.

He first heard live jazz as a teenager, in 1953, when Louis Armstrong came through Osaka on his second tour of Japan. He received a degree in English literature from Kansai University, writing his thesis on uses of the word "jazz" in modern American literature.

After graduating, he left Osaka for Tokyo, where he began working for the Japanese edition of DownBeat magazine.

At a news conference in 1966, early in his career, Mr. Koyama asked John Coltrane where he saw himself in 10 years. Coltrane responded, "I'd like to be a saint."

Though said jokingly, the answer took on an illuminative significance in the mythos around Coltrane. It would later seem to have foreshadowed his unexpected death a year later, at 40, and the kind of mythical status that he acquired thereafter.

In the 1980s, having left Swing Journal, Mr. Koyama often worked as a consultant for Japanese record labels, producing boxed sets. He was responsible for "The Complete Keynote Collection," a 1986 anthology of selections from a label that recorded Coleman Hawkins, Lionel Hampton and others in the 1940s, and the 1989 collection "Brownie: The Complete EmArcy Recordings of Clifford Brown." Both were released in the United States and nominated for Grammy Awards in the historical album category. Dan Morgenstern's notes for the Clifford Brown anthology won a Grammy.

Mr. Koyama was a disc jockey on NHK for over 50 years. He hosted a Saturday-night show called "Jazz Tonight," featuring records from his collection and interviews with musicians, until four months before his death.



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